

It's ALA Convention weekend. It's Pride weekend. The Supreme Court just made a groundbreaking decision regarding marriage rights. And THIS DAY IN JUNE won the Stonewall Award – which still feels incredibly surreal to me. I feel enormous pressure to say something profound about all this that brings all of this together. And I don't know if that will happen. I can say this: all of these events, culminating together in one weekend, feels so exhilarating – but it also feels bittersweet.

Shooting in Ferguson

Riots in Baltimore

And Black churches burning throughout the South.

Hashtags are flying through the Twitterverse – statements like:

#BlackLivesMatter

#TransLivesMatter

And #Not1More.

Hence why this weekend has felt bittersweet to me.

So. . . that's a heavy-duty way to begin an acceptance speech, I realize. So let me bring it back to the reason we're here.

The morning of February 2, I woke up, stumbled out of bed, and checked my phone. Because I have to see what I missed while I was asleep, you see. One of the notifications was an e-mail from a woman named Jess. All it said was:

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE STONEWALL!

“Confused” isn't a strong enough word to describe how I felt. You see, Jess works in my city councilmember's office in Sacramento. I know her because I had called the office, desperately trying to find a way to get rid of a stray rooster that had taken up residence in the alley behind my house. This rooster crowed reliably at 4am every morning, which I actually found to be endearing. He was a beautiful rooster. The dealbreaker was when he flew into my yard and murdered one of my chickens. Things got real then. So after multiple but fruitless attempts to do something about this rooster, Jess had pulled some strings and gotten Animal Control to lend me a trap, and ultimately I caught the rooster. That's how I know her. So getting this e-mail from her was beyond bizarre. But within seconds, I knew this wasn't a mistake, because my Facebook, Twitter, email account, and phone just BLEW UP. And it blew up for DAYS.

And then, I received a letter in the mail. A handwritten, mailed letter. Who does that? This is what it said:

Let me add my own congratulations. As one of those old timers who was at Stonewall and our first Pride march, it amazes me how far we've all come in these past 45 years. That Stonewall is more than the event is itself a mark of how far that we've come.

Congrats, Fred

I read that, and my heart started pounding. And then I started to cry.

I wrote Fred a letter back, and I included a signed copy of THIS DAY IN JUNE. And we began a correspondence. I learned that his partner at the time was Craig Rodwell, who owned the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, and Fred managed the operations of the store. The bookshop was a gathering place for activists – people who were radical revolutionaries tended to gravitate there.

Fred wrote long letters documenting his involvement with the Stonewall riots and with the Christopher Street Liberation Day march (the first Pride march).

He sent me photographs of the march and the bookstore.

He sent a CD of an audio clip from an interview he did immediately after the first night of rioting.

Every day, I found myself anticipating the mail carrier, wanting to see if something from Fred had come. Eventually, Fred disclosed that he had an e-mail account (WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME???), and so we started corresponding that way. For a while, I received an e-mail from him almost every day. I can't even begin to convey the depth of what I learned from him about that time period. And I felt a strong compulsion to learn more. I wanted to go to the source.

And so I did. Earlier this month, I traveled to New York City. I visited the Stonewall Inn and explored the neighborhood. I walked along the route of the first Christopher Street Liberation Day march, held exactly one year after the Stonewall riots. I'm from the East Coast originally, and I've been to NYC many times, but never in this way. I visited the New York Public Library and the University of Connecticut Library and viewed the materials of activists who participated in the riots and the march. (SIDE NOTE: Librarians are the best. You all know that! But I want to say that librarians who work in Special Collections are THE BEST.)

There's no way I can share with you all the things I learned in the time that I have. Going through documents, photographs, and other materials really placed me there, during the riots and the aftermath. But this is crystal clear to me: The Stonewall Riots were a revolutionary uprising, and a powerful act of resistance, propelled by those who existed on the extreme margins of society. The people who participated in the Stonewall Riots stood their ground, and spoke their truth. They swung the closet door open and refused to be quiet, button up, and look good. That is the spirit that is embodied within the name "Stonewall," and it's what makes me so incredibly proud to have that word attached to my book, THIS DAY IN JUNE.

When I wrote THIS DAY IN JUNE, I knew that I had created something that was radically different than any other LGBT children's book I'd ever seen. I wrote it because I wanted to see books that reflected our community joyfully, diversely, and unapologetically – and truthfully, I wasn't seeing much of that. I wanted to open a book and see the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and the Dykes on Bikes, and leather, and rainbows, and kissing, and fabulous costumes, and signs of activism. I wanted to create a queer-centric book that wasn't centered around making straight people feel safe and comfortable, but instead spark questions and dialogue.

We need more of this.

We need people who don't think they're writers to find their voice and write their truth from their own lived experience.

We need editors who are willing to listen to voices that are unfamiliar and different from their own, broaden the range of voices and narratives that are published, and move away from playing it safe.

We need librarians who are willing to order every LGBT-themed book they can find – and who continue to defend their right to keep them on the shelves when they get challenged.

These are radical actions - because that is the spirit of Stonewall.

I'm so thankful to those who have embraced that radical vision with me. Kristine Enderle, my editor at Magination Press, is the best. Her vision for THIS DAY IN JUNE was even more radical than mine. I'm grateful to people like Leslea Newman, who paved the way for all of us who write LGBT children's books, and whose writing feedback raises my craft to a new level. I want to thank Maya Christina Gonzalez, whose radical vision and whale-sized heart inspires me to write from the deepest place possible. I want to thank my critique partners – Jen Newkom, Elizabeth Siggins, Jen Barton, and Randy Snook – for being my writing family. And I want to thank my family. Amy, the light of my life, who gives me more time and space to write than I would give to myself. And Rowan, my daughter, who isn't here today, but is more effective at book marketing than any of the Big publishers. She reads my book to her classmates on the playground. She tells the kids in her summer camp that her mommy was on television because she wrote a book about Pride. Do you know what Pride is? She is truly an activist. I love you.

I had the privilege of marching in the Pride Parade yesterday with ALA and with the San Francisco Public Library bookmobile. I've been to many Pride celebrations, including SF Pride, and marched in quite a few parades. But this was my first time marching in this parade. And I came to understand Pride in a way that I hadn't before. It's corporatized (hello, Apple!). It's inconvenient. But on this day, we shut this city down, and we brought it to life. And that's exactly what the original marchers did at the first Christopher Street Liberation Day, 45 years ago.

So, I want to offer a vision for today, and for the future. A vision that helps me bring together all of the bittersweet ambivalence I've felt this weekend. Because children are our most powerful visionaries, and the books we write for them can preserve and amplify that.

All invited

All excited

This Day in June we're all united.

Thank you.